



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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1985-86 MIGRATORY GAME BIRD HUNTING REGULATIONS PROPOSED

Preliminary hunting regulations for ducks, geese, and other migratory game birds for the 1985-86 hunting season have been proposed by the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The preliminary proposals, published in the March 14 Federal Register, describe tentative season frameworks, daily bag and possession limits, and shooting hours for migratory game birds in the contiguous United States, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Species discussed in the proposals include ducks, geese, brant, and swans; doves and pigeons; cranes, rails, coots, and gallinules; and woodcock and snipe.

Shooting hours will remain from one-half hour before sunrise to sunset. Proposed framework dates for most duck and goose seasons are from October 1, 1985, to January 20, 1986, for the Atlantic Flyway; from Saturday, September 28 to January 20 for the Mississippi Flyway; and from September 28 through Sunday, January 19 for the Central and Pacific Flyways. Proposed framework dates for Alaska for waterfowl, snipe, and sandhill cranes are between September 1 and January 26. Puerto Rico's framework dates are between November 5 and February 28 for ducks, coots, gallinules, and snipe. Virgin Islands' dates are between December 1 and January 31 for ducks. Framework dates represent outside season limits, within which the actual hunting seasons selected by States may be more restrictive.

During the 1980-81 hunting season, the Service joined Canada in a 5-year study of stabilized hunting regulations for ducks to investigate the relationships between duck populations and duck harvest. The 1984-85 hunting season was the final harvest period with the regulations stabilized for this program, but field activities such as banding and radio-telemetry will continue through 1985. A final evaluation of stabilized regulations will be available sometime in 1986. The proposed duck harvest regulations for 1985 therefore do not reflect results of the stabilized regulations study.

Significant proposals in the preliminary regulations include:

--Eastern Woodcock Population. The number of woodcock in the Atlantic Flyway has declined significantly since the 1960's. Relationships to the decline among regulations, harvest, and habitat are not fully understood. Because of the decline, the Service believes an adjustment in harvest opportunity is necessary, and is proposing to restrict hunting of the Eastern Woodcock population for 3 years beginning in September 1985. Under the proposal, States in the Atlantic Flyway may select hunting seasons of not more than 45 days between October 1 and January 31, with daily bag and possession limits of 3 and 6 respectively. Previous regulations allowed a season length of 65 days between October 1 and February 28 with a bag and possession limit of 5 and 10, respectively.

(over)

--Dusky Canada geese, Pacific Flyway greater white-fronted geese, cackling Canada geese, and Pacific brant. Restrictive regulations for these species were initiated in the Pacific Flyway in 1984 because of declines in their populations. No significant changes from last year's regulations are anticipated at this time.

--American Black ducks. No changes in seasons and bag limits for black ducks are proposed at this time pending a review of the 1984-85 black duck harvest. Restrictive regulations for black ducks have been in effect since 1983.

The preliminary proposals do not reflect possible restrictions on regulations that are being considered by the Fish and Wildlife Service for mallards and pintails. Mallard and pintail populations have declined significantly during the last few years, primarily as a result of drought in Canadian nesting areas. This decline is in addition to a 30-year decline in breeding populations because of habitat loss. A notice asking for public comments on harvest strategies for mallards and pintails was published in the February 15 Federal Register. Public comments are being accepted through April 15 and will be considered along with other information during the process of establishing the 1985 waterfowl hunting regulations.

All of the published proposals are subject to changes if the need is indicated by information obtained from surveys, State conservation agencies, other interested groups, and the public. Public comments on the proposals are invited through June 20, 1985, for Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands; through July 15, 1985, for other "early" seasons (those opening before October 1); and through August 19, 1985, for the "late" seasons (those opening after October 1).

To ensure that the public has ample opportunity to comment on the proposals, two public hearings will be held to review the status of migratory game birds and consider proposed hunting regulations. The first hearing will pertain to "early" season regulations and will be held on June 20, 1985, at 9 a.m. in the Department of the Interior auditorium on C Street between 18th and 19th Streets NW, Washington, D.C. 20240. A second hearing on regulations for "late" seasons will be held at the same location and time on August 1.

Persons who wish to comment on the proposed regulations or participate in the public hearings should write to the Director (FWS/MBMO), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. Those wishing to make statements at the public hearings should file copies with the Director before or during each hearing.